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Punk: Where audience outshines performers

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ
of The Gazette

Punk rock reached a local zenith on Saturday night when Iggy Pop and the Ramones performed at Le Plateau.

Not that the music was great — it was bad, very rank. Punk-rock is almost by definition of rudimentary character. It is generally performed by people of limited talents, whose rationale is that what they play is the really good stuff: Rock 'n' roll with energy and what, after all, is rock 'n' roll without energy?

Punk-rock is a vehicle in which to exercise rock 'n' roll fantasies, for both artiste and audience. It is the pleasure of hearing the sound of your own noise, and standing between giant speakers (and, in fact, climbing on top of them as did Iggy Pop) amidst high-volume rock din. It is simply occupying the stage, looking totally nonchalent and mean, surrounded by a lot of noise.

This aesthetic conveys meaning to those who perform and to those who listen. What goes on on stage is of such poor quality that it gives the audience an opportunity to outdo the performers. Thus, Le Plateau was filled with black leather and vinyl-clad punks and(or) punk-fans.

They didn't just dress up, but they also slouched with the same kind of mock-attitude as in the 'Happy Days' ('Fonz') television show. Punks started mock-fights in the lobby at intermission for the benefit of inquiring photographers. They wore silver sequins and garish rust-cheek, black-eye make-up. They combined the stance of Marlon Brando in 'The Wild One' with a camp interpretation of 1940s movie melodrama.

They stood on the seats to stare at their counterparts on stage, many gazing with the same kind of sullen, smart-ass insolence that Iggy Pop and the Ramones were exuding on stage.

The real accomplishment of punk-rock is that it puts the onus of artistry squarely in the hands of the audience.

So when Iggy Pop says, "Thanks a lot, shitheads," he is merely engaging in oneupmanship with his audience. He climbs atop the amplifier as if to say "This is mine" or "I'm the king of the castle", and the audience gets charged wondering if he'll fall off.

Iggy Pop, who used to lead a Detroit-based band The Stooges in the late 1960s, makes what he does on stage appear to be very difficult. He seems a defiant wreck, pale, slouched, sweating profusely, writhing with paralytic movements or staring stone-straight at the audience, eyes glassy, jaw clenched.

Occasionally he lurches backstage, begging his roadies and onlookers for a beer. "Where do we go from here," he asks in oblivion. He makes look tough what a stage artist in possession of basic faculties can accomplish easily. The difficulty and defiance of it all is what the audience identifies with.

Of course, there's a big difference between this American punk-rock and the British species. Across the pond, punk-ism is a political revolt against high-cost living and, by extension, high-cost entertainment. It is a shot of speed through which to vent anger and frustration.

In America, punk-rock is akin to slumming. As the Ramones were saying at a hastily-assembled post-concert press conference: "We just do it for entertainment. What's there to complain about in the U.S.?"

The quartet is quick to put-down the Rolling Stones, the most influential group on the punk-generation, as archaic and passe.

"They're more blues than rock," says Johnny Ramone condescendingly. "They don't have that raw energy anymore," says Tommy Ramome.

The Ramones supposedly do, because energy is the prime ingredient they reflect on stage; it is all they can do to be energetic, to ride the crest of their guitar chords.

The Ramones and their ilk spend so much time trying to simulate raw energy that they have little concern for expressing anything else. They are the ultimate in defeatism and nihilism in rock. Because they are incapable of anything more subtle, they bludgeon you with simplistic aggressive epithets.

Musically they are only repititious. Not that rock 'n' roll isn't by nature based on a few repititious chords and motifs, but the better rock builds from that without sacrificing the immediacy. The Ramones and Iggy Pop will never develop because the nature of their chosen style says that they must not.

IGGY POP
A defiant wreck

Record album traces Queen's life and times

By GREGORY JENSEN
UPI

LONDON — Queen Elizabeth's Silver Jubilee year isn't over yet, and the BBC is issuing a stream of royal records while the celebrations are fresh.

One is a tourist souvenir — an album frankly designed to bring back "our trip to Britain" memories when folks get back home.

Another is a splendid collector's piece — a double album 'portrait in sound' of Queen Elizabeth's life and times.

'Vivat Regina,' as this luxurious package is called, is limited to 15,000 copies, each individually numbered. Its sounds and recorded events are the stuff of history.

The BBC dug deep into its archives for recordings of the queen's marriage to Prince Philip, her coronation, the wedding of her sister, Princess Margaret, and that of her daughter, Princess Anne.

Writer and narrator Robert Hudson couples royal events and interviews — every royal-family member is included in the albums — with other major milestones in the 30 years beginning with the queen's marriage in 1947.

Sir Winston Churchill's funeral is there, for instance, and Neil Armstrong's first words from the moon. There are sounds of street fighting in the Budapest uprising of 1956 and Harold Macmillan's 'Winds of Change' African speech in 1960.

This essay in serious history is balanced by three other Silver Jubilee records issued at the same time.

They're all music — two albums of "the most memorable hits of the past 25 years" of the queen's reign and one, featuring the marching band of the Welsh Guards regiment, of music linked to royal themes.

'Royal Britain,' however, is something else.

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